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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses educational reform centering on teacher participation and leadership. Although schools have developed new mission statements and implemented strategic planning and site-based management in recent years, most schools are not set up to accept teachers in leadership roles. The literature suggests that our "new" schools must be built on shared authority and responsibility, which requires that staff trade assignments and work in multiple groups to remain in touch with the school as a whole. In 1990, Woods Learning Center (WLC)--an elementary school in Casper, Wyoming--eliminated the position of school principal. Driving this decision was the desire to reallocate the money saved in a principal's salary to the children in the classroom. At WLC, principal duties and responsibilities are shared across the whole staff in the form of administrative teams--pairs of teachers responsible for handling such matters as budget and finance, board and community relations, curriculum and instruction, staff evaluation, and staff hiring. In interviews, board members commented that a traditional principal would have inhibited or prevented this change. Although research regarding shared decision making and the role of teachers as leaders is not promising, this school has experienced success with the changes it has made. Most teachers have had little preparation in school governance. Until leadership skills and competencies are addressed in teacher education programs, attempts to improve schools through changes in governance structures will continue to have little effect. Contains 26 references. (LP)

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TEACHERS AS LEADERS: IS THE PRINCIPAL REALLY NEEDED?

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> On one day, lying alone on the lawn on my back, hearing only the moan and groan of some far off train on a distant track, I saw above me, 2,000 feet or more, something which to this day, I must say, I've never seen anything like before. The head goose, the leader of the "V," suddenly swerved out, leaving a vacancy that promptly was filled by the bird behind. The leader then flew alongside, the formation growing wide, and took his place at the back of the line - and they never missed a beat.
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> Unpublished poem, R.D. Stomberg, 1982
> In *Improving Schools from Within*
> by Roland S. Barth

Much of the current wave of educational reform centers on teacher participation and empowerment (Keith, 1996). The flood of educational literature suggests an increase in leadership opportunities for teachers. School districts across the country have implemented school restructuring featuring system decentralization (i.e., site-based management) and versions of teacher participation, including shared decision making at the school level (Hess, 1991,1992; David, 1989). Teacher empowerment, school-based management, and shared decision making are terms commonly heard at local, state, and national levels.

A recent survey of school board members found that more than two-thirds of districts were involved in locally initiated school reform, and for some 70% this meant site-based management and teacher empowerment (Gaul, Underwood, &Fortune, 1994). The expectation is that including teachers in decision making will improve instruction and therefore improve student achievement (Weiss, 1995).

THE PROBLEM

With such visionaries in the field of leadership as Deming, Senge, Sarason, Fullan, Sergiovani, and Nanus, to name just a few, schools have a pretty good understanding of leadership and learning organizations. Schools have developed new visions and mission statements, implemented strategic planning and site-based management, and trained personnel in total quality management (TQM).

However, most of our schools today are not set up to accept teachers in leadership roles and often discourage teachers from taking on additional responsibilities. When looking closely at schools, we find the common practice of decision making to involve arranging duty schedules, handling detention rooms for

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after school discipline, supervising bus arrivals and departures, arranging field trips, and scheduling school assemblies. Teachers are generally not making decisions about the improvement of student learning, implementing curricular and instructional innovations, selecting professional development and inservice programs, developing and implementing evaluation strategies for personnel, developing assessment procedures, selecting their staff and principal, and designing and implementing long-range goals for the school.

The common practice of shared decision making in many of our schools is "advertised" as sharing the decisions that affect school policy. By and large, the environment over which teachers have power tends to be carefully limited. Their power reaches only partially into what Carnoy and Levin (1985) describe as the microtechnical and, to a lesser extent, the micropolitical levels (Keith, 1996).

Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) point out that teachers have been the last to be consulted and their voices have not and still do not inform the actions taken to rectify what reformers believe to be the matter with education in the United States. The two authors further state:

> The absence of teachers from the dialogue and decision making on reform has been a serious omission. It has yielded faulty definitions of the problem, solutions that compound rather than confront the problem, and a demeaned and demoralized teaching force. Efforts to improve education are doomed to failure until teachers become respected partners in the process. If reform is to be successful, their voices and views must be included to alter their work. Although their involvement cannot insure success, their absence will guarantee continued failure. (p. xvi)

THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Fullan (1993) makes the stand that if true learning organizations occur, the principalship as we know it, may disappear. Sergiovani (1992) talks about "substitutes for leadership" in the sense that as teachers combine a commitment to moral purpose with a continual pursuit of exemplary practice, leadership becomes built in. Every teacher becomes a leader, and more precisely, the norms, ideals, and practices of groups generate continual improvement. In a real sense, what gives the contemporary principal inflated importance is the absence of leadership in everyday teachers.

Sergiovani (1994) states that our "new" schools must be built on shared authority and responsibility, not delegation of authority and responsibility. The responsibility for a school lies with the professional staff of the school, not solely or predominantly with a designated leader. If there is delegation of authority, it must come from the team to the individual.

Sergiovani also contends in his discussion of a democratic structure for leadership that the staff must trade assignments and work in multiple groups to remain in touch with the school as a whole. The responsibilities of the principal should ordinarily be assumed for relatively short periods of time. The staff should include individuals whose experience includes terms of work in administration and instructional development as well as classroom teaching.

Even the collaborative principal may be too authoritarian for the true learning organization to take shape. Nias (1992) found in her studies that even the collaborative leader was too dominant for the development envisioned in the new work of school leaders. Her studies concluded that collaborative leaders were "central and powerful" figures in their schools and remained in control of developments which took place within them (Fullan, 1993).

Leadership, as has been practiced and is being practiced, discourages independence and innovation. Strong instructional leaders (principals), even though their teachers are capable of providing all of the necessary leadership, force teachers into dependent roles and remove opportunities and incentives for them to be self-managers (Sergiovani, 1994).

An elementary school in Casper, Wyoming, has dared to change the traditional paradigm of school governance. This school has elected to provide for student learning without the usual principal and/or vice-principal. In addition to the staff absorbing the responsibilities of the traditional principal, they have completely redefined the role of the teacher in the classroom. Rather than the teacher being viewed as the major agent in the learning process, the students are placed in teacher-created situations and environments in which they begin to construct their own learning. The school has begun to experience what Senge (1990) refers to when stating that "all in the organization must master the cycle of thinking, doing, evaluating, and reflecting."

A CASE STUDY - WOODS LEARNING CENTER IN CASPER, WYOMING

"No more prizes for predicting rain...prizes only for building arcs."
Louis Gerstner

In 1990, five teachers prepared a proposal for a new concept in elementary schools. A partnership evolved between business leaders, teachers, and the school district board of trustees. After many months of

negotiation with the board and superintendent, the Woods Learning Center (WLC) opened its doors to students and parents in the fall of 1991.

Among the many unique features of the K-8 WLC is the absence of a school principal. The staff and parents made the choice and commitment to facilitate the education of children by sharing all of the normal duties and responsibilities of an administrator. Driving the decision was the desire to reallocate the money saved in a principal's salary to the children in the classroom. The result was a 17 to 1 student/teacher ratio in each grade level.

Additional features of the WLC include multi-age classrooms, thematic integrated curriculum, foreign language instruction, apprenticeship programs, alternative assessments, project oriented instruction, parent contracts, artists in residence, and enriched kindergarten programs. Children are developmentally grouped in grade level pods of K, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8 and taught by a team of teachers.

Principal duties and responsibilities are shared across the whole staff in the form of administrative teams. For example, a pair of teachers is responsible for handling personnel matters while another pair may work with budget and finances. Teams are responsible for board and community relations, curriculum and instruction, staff evaluation, and the hiring of staff. Guiding the operation of WLC is the philosophy that their school is a supportive community where student learning is shared by all stakeholders involved; teachers, parents, support staff, and district board of trustees.

Upon interviewing the superintendent and board members who were responsible for accepting the WLC proposal, it was revealed that there actually was a fear that a building principal would inhibit and prevent the concept from becoming a reality. Judy Catchpole, former board member and current Wyoming State Superintendent of Public Instruction states:

> Educationally, the proposal was excellent. As a board, we were convinced that the proposal had the interests of children and learning as a priority. Our concern was that a traditional principal would not have the ability to relinquish individual authority and allow for total shared governance at the school. So in fact, the absence of a principal was not a fear for us. (interview, 1997)

Former board member, Steve Kinner, adds:

> The proposal was so well planned and presented that we had no doubt that the school could operate without a principal. We believed the existing leadership (principals) in our district would actually be counterproductive to the proposal presented by the WLC staff. (interview, 1997).

SHARED DECISION MAKING: WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T WORK, AND WHY?

The research on school-based management and shared decision making reveals disappointing results in regards to the success of these reforms (Weise,1995; Mirel, 1994). There is a lack of significant quantitative data suggesting a positive relationship between shared decision making and school improvement (i.e., student learning, school climate, and/or teacher satisfaction). Many new decision making structures have led to disappointment, or even disaster (Beadie, 1996).

One of the most significant studies of decision making in the schools (Weise, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992) looked at the shared governance structures of forty-five schools across the country. The recurring theme across all schools studied was the confusion over who actually had the final word when it came to accepting and implementing a decision made by the decision making group (Beadie, 1996). Decisions were often reversed or modified by the principal or district superintendent. In other cases, administrators did not assume clear responsibilities causing teachers to be uncertain over how far their decision making authority extended.

The most successful shared governance structures observed by the researchers involved management teams in which the principal was simply a member with the chairship rotated. Successful shared decision making models must be built on true "sharing" of authority and responsibility rather than the delegation of authority and responsibility. In order for shared governance to be effective, the responsibility of the school must lie with the professional staff and community, not solely or predominantly with a designated leader (Sergiovani, 1994). If there is delegation of authority, it must come from the team to the individual.

Senge (1990) discusses the term "alignment" as being the phenomenon of a group functioning as a whole. An "unaligned" group involves individual members working at cross purposes resulting in wasted energy. Individuals may work very hard, but their efforts do not translate to team effort. An "aligned" group, on the other hand, possesses a shared direction and common purpose.

Sergiovani also states in his discussion of a democratic structure for leadership that the staff must trade assignments and work in multiple groups to remain in touch with the school as a whole. The role of principal should ordinarily be assumed for relatively short periods of time. The staff should include individuals whose experience includes terms of work in administration and instructional development as well as classroom teaching.

Holmes (1993), in discussing total quality management, states that leadership need not to be vested in one person but leadership roles can be played by a variety of people as the situation and individual expertise dictate. However, each team member must be ready to accept additional leadership responsibilities.

Teachers cannot wait for the system to change itself. They must push for the kind of professional culture they want, sometimes in the face of unresponsive administrators, communities and school districts, and sometimes taking advantage of the increasing opportunities to engage in substantial reform efforts that restructure and reculture schools toward continuous learning for all (Fullan, 1993).

NEED FOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Teachers are expected to respond to school governance but have had little training in preparation. Where in teacher preparation programs do future teachers learn about leadership? Teachers are generally "unsophisicated" in the subject of school governance (Sarason, 1993).

The problem is that in most cases, even when teachers are given more decision making powers, they find that nothing in their training has prepared them for handling such a role. It is inexcusable for a teacher preparation program to fail to expose its students to the predictable problems they will face in the matter of school governance (Sarason, 1993).

How often has it happened that administrators provide the environment and opportunities for teachers to participate in educational policy making and - nothing happens? We reply, "they don't want to help make decisions or involve themselves in the process." We fail to see the real reason for their non-participation. They lack the experience, expertise, training, and knowledge of school leadership and decision making.

Should we teach leadership skills in administrative preparation programs only, or should we also teach leadership skills in our teacher preparation programs? Goodlad (1991) stated that undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs do not regularly include preparation in assuming leadership roles outside of the classroom (Smyser, 1996). Lieberman, Saxl, and Mills (1988) reported that teachers need to develop skills in building rapport, dealing with change, and managing the demands of leadership. Other authors (Gehrke, 1991; Goodlad, 1991; Manthei, 1992) have advised that leadership skills would be helpful to classroom teachers.

Until we address leadership skills and competencies in our teacher education programs, attempts to improve schools through changes in governance structures will continue to have little affect. An additional outcome resulting from providing leadership training for our future teachers may be an improvement in the common unproductive relationships between teachers and administrators.

CONCLUSION

The teachers, parents, and community of the Woods Learning Center have proven that they have the assets to change the school in ways they think and believe to be necessary and desirable. They are truly empowered to make decisions based on the needs of their program. The staff admits that the job is not an easy one and not without its trials and tribulations, but continues to be a very rewarding process. Their comments include, "after many smiles and tears, blisters and hugs, we have a school that is well on its way to becoming what it is meant to be - an environment in which children and adults can learn together, be successful, and feel confident about facing the challenges in an ever-changing world." A bond has been created because of their mutual beliefs in how children can and should learn.

> I found out that those geese can fly from way up north to way down south, and back again. But they cannot do it alone, you see. It's something they must do in community. Oh, I know, it's a popular notion, and people swell with pride and emotion to think of themselves on the eagle side - strong, self-confident, solitary. Not bad traits. But we are what we are - that's something we can't choose. And though many of us would like to be seen as the eagle, I think God made us more like The Goose.
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> Stomberg, 1982
> In *Improving Schools from Within*
> by Roland S. Barth

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